



Michigan B.A.S.S. Nation



Dedicated to Youth, Conservation and Bass Anglers of Michigan

Web Site: <http://www.michiganbass.net>

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March 24, 2014

Representative LaFontaine,

I am writing regarding Senate Bill 869 recently assigned to your Natural Resources Committee. I'm the conservation director for the Michigan B.A.S.S. Nation (MBN) and we support SB 869. SB 869 is necessary due to a year-round Michigan bass fishing season proposal we submitted to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) Warmwater Resources Steering Committee (WRSC) last June. For the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) to use the authority granted to them by Public Act 21 of 2013 to create a longer bass season with an earlier opening day, we must first remove the statewide bass season limit and separate later bass season limit on Lake St. Clair from state law.

Passing SB 869 will allow us to continue to work with the MDNR, other fishing groups and the NRC to create more Michigan bass fishing opportunity. We were very happy to have Senator Hansen introduce SB 869 for us and the MDNR, and to have it passed unanimously in the Senate with the immediate effect recommendation. The MDNR says they will go to a biannual printed Fishing Guide in 2015. In order to get the year-round Michigan bass season we've worked so long for in time for the 2015 Fishing Guide and fishing season, we need to amend state law to remove the bass season limits, and get a recommendation through the public meeting process and then two monthly meetings of the NRC by October.

We've been told if we miss this window we have to wait until the 2017 fishing season for any change. That is a lot of lost fishing opportunity and lost economic impact for Michigan's important Natural Resource Economy. This is why immediate effect is important to us. We have been working for scientific management and wise use of Michigan's abundant largemouth and smallmouth bass since the early 1980s so we've already waited a long, long time.

MBN supported Proposal G in 1996 and we supported Public Act 21 last year to give the NRC authority to manage fish and game species using sound science working with the MDNR and fishing/hunting groups. We last worked to increase the Michigan bass season with 5 more weeks of catch-and-release spring bass fishing back in 2006. Our bass season hadn't changed since 1970 before that though we ran a test catch-and-release April 1 until Memorial weekend season on 6 inland lakes from 1988 until 2006. Studies on those lakes showed no harm to the bass populations due to the additional fishing opportunity with more satisfied anglers who fished more days.

While Michigan added 5 weeks of catch-and-release bass fishing in 2006, with the same available data, both Pennsylvania and New York ended their statewide bass closures leaving Michigan as one of only 4 states out of 49 with bass that still have a statewide closed bass season. Wisconsin, Minnesota and Maine are the other three hold outs.

MBN wants to help Michigan rival Florida in fishing tourism plus improve our success in attracting major events, and we believe we have the quality water and bass populations to do that. I've included a copy of our bass season proposal for your information. Our proposal calls for legal catch-and-release bass fishing from January 1 through the Friday before Memorial weekend, and moving Lake St. Clair from the unscientific later regular June opener to Memorial weekend with the rest of our lakes. This will allow anglers to fish more tournaments for a few weeks if they choose on our most popular, best bass lake – Lake St. Clair. Restricting our best, most famous bass lake more than all our other lakes by keeping it closed until the third Friday in June is like holding your starting quarterback out of the game until the third quarter.

Michigan panfish anglers can generally fish most waters all year. Walleye, pike, trout and salmon anglers can generally fish all year, at least on much of the Great Lakes. These are all harvest fish. Michigan bass anglers voluntarily release an average of 80% to 92% of the legal-sized bass they catch yet are limited the most with a months-long statewide closed season despite bass not being a harvest species. Most states don't have a statewide bass closure because studies have shown that largemouth and smallmouth bass, the largest members of the panfish family, generally produce an abundance of fry with the success of each year class usually dependent upon factors out of our control, such as weather.



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We believe dissatisfaction among anglers who can't target their favorite fish for a significant part of the year contributes to an issue of utmost importance to all of us – retaining anglers and recruiting new anglers – equaling lost fishing license sales and reduced funding for Natural Resources protection and management. Studies have shown the later in the year anglers have to wait to fish for their favorite species, the higher the risk they decide not to buy a fishing license that year due to competing priorities, especially during the summer months.

We also lose significant revenue for our Natural Resources Economy due to anglers traveling out of Michigan to bass fish elsewhere each spring, and because nonresident anglers attracted to our abundant waters are unable to legally fish for bass during part of spring – a desirable season for many bass anglers. The majority of these anglers come from states where they can bass fish all year, including Indiana and Ohio next door. Indiana, despite having the largest bass federation in the U.S. and a tiny fraction of the water acreage we have, allows bass fishing all year including the choice to have bass tournaments all year. Numbers of Michigan bass anglers leave Michigan every April and May to fish bass tournaments in Indiana because they can't do it here even though we have vastly more water and bass. Two studies in the past 10 years by the Indiana DNR have reported that their bass populations are as good as or better than ever including bass in their Northern natural lakes that are most similar to many lakes in Michigan even though Indiana has allowed catch-and-keep bass fishing year-round since the 1960s.

The 2011 US Fish and Wildlife Survey (USFWS) showed 589,000 resident and nonresident anglers fished for Michigan bass second only to panfish in number of anglers, and **first** in number of days spent fishing at 8,739,000 angler-days. At the USFWS average trip-related expenditure of \$39/day bass anglers boost Michigan's Natural Resource Economy by \$341 Million/year in gas, motel/hotel, food and similar costs alone. That amount does not include fishing tackle, boats, motors and other gear.

The MDNR reported that 16% of surveyed anglers said they would fish in a spring catch-and-release season. If 16% of 589,000 anglers fishes one additional angler-day they add another \$3.67 million of trip-related spending alone towards our Natural Resource Economy. Passing SB 869 with immediate effect allows us to continue working with the MDNR and the NRC for the year-round bass season anglers in 45 other states already enjoy.

I'd be happy to discuss SB 869 and the positive impact on Michigan of more bass fishing and bass tournament fishing opportunity, or answer any questions you may have. MBN is the state affiliate to the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.) – the organization that ran the two large national tournaments last August on Lake St. Clair near your district and in September on Muskegon Lake in Senator Hansen's district.

Though our present proposal only adds the few additional weeks of potential bass tournament opportunity on Lake St. Clair others have talked about the possibility of a longer spring bass tournament season too. We are open to discussing this. Our Memorial weekend opener keeps us out of range for many national events. National bass tournaments put a multi-media spotlight on Michigan, and each event can bring an economic impact of \$750,000 to over \$3 Million based on studies by the major tournament organizations and other host cities. Last September's Muskegon Lake Bassmaster event had a three-day spectator attendance of 15,000 persons. Muskegon businesses, local government and the tourism people reported high satisfaction and impact from that event. With bass being the number one game fish in the U.S. and Michigan's abundant quality waters full of bass, we should be the bass fishing destination leader. Thank you.

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